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The Mexican American population at the present time is approximately 4 million, of which 80% are urban dwellers. For the city schools this situation poses difficult problems which have remained mostly unsolved, as evidenced by the high rate of Mexican American dropouts from high schools. Since the educational system has failed the Mexican American, educators should seek help from the community power structure in order to involve the community in improving education. However, local leaders should be identified by the Mexican American community and not by the Anglo community. Mexican Americans are determined to make significant changes in the educational process of the bilingual-bicultural student, and educators must either meet the challenge, or be inundated by it. (RH)

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UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH THE POWER STRUCTURE IN THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

I want to congratulate the American Association of School Administrators for the creation of this clinic on political and power structure. Perhaps if such a program had been available a decade ago some of our schools would not be in a posture of defense and confusion. The politics of educational economics and majority culture structure will not save today's school executive. He must engage in the politics of human rights and equal educational opportunity as the minority cultures define and demand these basic expectations of democracy.

The past twelve months has produced confrontations between the school and the Mexican-American community in over a dozen school systems throughout the country. These conflicts involved education from the pre-school level through the colleges. They are found in an area reaching from San Jose in northern California through all the Southwest and encompassing such unlikely locations as Chicago, Kansas City, and Denver. They have been particularly abrasive in Los Angeles, San Antonio, and El Paso. The primary target is clear in all cases--educational programs designed to give the Chicano the tools necessary to compete with all other Americans in today's society.

Briefly, what is the picture of the Mexican-American and education? There are over four and one-half million Mexican-Americans in the five southwest states of Arizona, Colorado, California, New Mexico, and Texas. There are at least another half million in the rest of the country. Over eighty percent of this total live in urban areas. Texas and California make up over eighty percent of the total population. Los Angeles has the third largest Mexican population in the Western Hemisphere.

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There are approximately one-hundred and fifty thousand migrant Mexican-Americans with about ten percent of these dropping out of the migrant stream each year. Clearly the Mexican-American is joining the rest of the population in making his home in the urban environment. He comes there with the same hope as the other minority groups--seeking a better opportunity for himself and his children.

The urban Mexican-American presents to the city school a specially difficult educational challenge. His linguistic and cultural heritage and background does not fit into the pattern of the school. And, unfortunately, the school until very recently took the position that the child must adapt to the frame-work developed for educating the urban child. This urban child until well within the past decade was mostly white. Now he is more likely in many cities to be black or brown or both. The schools are now adjusting their programs to make them more relevant to the needs of the black--they are still doing little for the Chicano.

The failure of the schools to move more forcefully in developing programs with relevance for educational success of the Mexican-American has resulted in disaster for at least one generation of Mexican-Americans. A massive dropout rate has resulted. The dropout rate in many high schools with a heavy Chicano student population exceeds fifty percent. In one or two of the States in the Southwest, the total dropout rate goes above sixty percent.

This appalling situation frightens me because what I really see is a positive decision by many of these students that says they see nothing in their school that will enable them to better themselves by continuing. The education they are receiving, even with a high school diploma, will not prepare them for much more than what they can obtain without that diploma. This is the real tragedy of the Mexican-American and education.

What does the Mexican-American want from his schools? What is happening in these communities that have had conflicts that a school man should know if he is going to be able to act instead of react to the demands for change?

Let's look at what the students are asking for. In Los Angeles in April of this year the demands for change by the students centered on the following areas:

1. Textbooks and curriculum revised to show Mexican contributions to society, to show the injustices they have suffered and to concentrate on Mexican folklore.

2. Compulsory bilingual and bicultural education in all East Los Angeles schools, with teachers and administrators to receive training in speaking Spanish and Mexican cultural heritage.

3. Counselor-student ratios reduced and counselors must speak Spanish and have a knowledge of Mexican cultural heritage.

4. Students must not be grouped into slow, average, and rapid ability groups and classes based on the poor tests currently in use which often mistake language problems for lack of intelligence.

5. Community parents be engaged as teacher's aides.

6. The industrial arts program must be revitalized to provide training for entry into industry; modern equipment and techniques must be provided.

The Los Angeles demands numbered well over 30--some requiring sums of money the district could not produce. The significant part is that most of the demands dealt with basic approaches for better education for the Mexican-American. Many of these could be met. Compare these demands of last spring in Los Angeles with those proposed by the Mexican-American students just this week in Chicago.

1. Qualified bilingual Spanish-American counselors.

2. One elective year of Latin-American culture and history taught by qualified bilingual Latin-American teachers.

3. Special TESL classes for non-English speaking students and be made a part of the school curriculum.

4. A Spanish American assistant principal at the high school with highest Spanish-speaking population.

5. Bilingual persons as clerks and teacher aides in the schools with heavy Spanish-speaking population.

6. Monthly Spanish meetings of the PTA conducted by a community authorized Spanish-speaking person.

The constant thread that runs through the demands and requests of the Mexican-American throughout the country is one of changing the entire approach to teaching bilingual-bicultural students in such a way that their language and their culture are bridges for better education not walls for poor education. This is a movement that is growing and gathering force and vitality every day. It may have some aspects of a dream unrelated to reality--but I see the evidence that the "way-out" dream of today will be the finely honed attainable vision of tomorrow.

This dream represents a hope that the Mexican-American still holds that despite the frustrations over educational deficiencies and failure, education is the real hope for economic and social mobility for the young. But drastic changes must be made first and now. And the entire Mexican-American community is girding for revolution that will bring such change. And I say revolution because this change will not be a revising of some parts of the existing structure--but a change in power participation. And the most exciting thing about this movement is that the young Chicano is leading it. If this movement is not to engulf the school as some of the most recent movements by other groups have done, the school better get ready now. And that's why we are here.

Let's talk about organization first. Let's put aside for all time, I hope, the canard that Mexican-Americans do not join organizations. That they do not organize. That there is great conflict among leaders. The truth is that if the issue is clear and demanding--the Mexican-Americans will unite and fight for it. The issue of education is clear to the entire community. What we have in the Mexican-American community today is several levels of organizations with varying abilities to work for better education.

I am talking about Community Service Organization, League of United Latin American Councils, American G.I. Forum, the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations, the Mexican-American Political Association, the Congress of Hispanic Educators, the Association of Mexican-American Educators. This is not a complete listing but covers most of the groups with State or regional operations.

Some of these older organizations are filled with Chicanos who have made it--to become Anglocized--or their leadership is tired or concerned mainly with other issues more related to the original aims of the group. But never be mislead that the apparent lack of vigor and drive means that the fight and determination will not be forthcoming when the situation demands it.

The second group of organizations is made up of those younger people--whose experiences in the educational arena are still fresh and who have embraced a goal of bringing the Mexican-American into full participation in our society. This group seeks aggressive ways and means to achieve the goals. It focuses very often on one or two major programs at a time. But the leadership is vigorous and skilled.

One of the most powerful of these groups is the Crusade for Justice in Denver lead by Corky Gonzales with a membership of over 1,800. Its program embraces a wide range of activities for helping the Mexican-American with education leading the list.

The third group is the students. Here are the members of UMAS, MAYA, MASA, MES, La Causa, and others. These are, for the most part, college students who see and want to correct the injustices wrought upon so many of their less fortunate friends by the present educational system. They are tough, determined, and smart. They are not bound by any economic structures and are willing to execute any plan that suggests success. This is the group that poses the greatest threat to the educational system, and yet promises the greatest chance for change. You may find many Mexican-American's speaking against them on the basis of tactics--but none speak against them on the basis of goals. Their silent support is vast and deep. The extent to which they can muster it over a long period of time remains to be seen. What I am saying to you is to prepare to deal with the young Chicano. How and on what grounds is something each community will need to explore.

Now let's talk a little bit about leadership. Again, let's make clear that there is no spokesman for the Mexican-American at any level, locally, regionally, or nationally. And this includes the smallest community. To get a somewhat accurate analysis of what is happening you should have along side of me some one like Dr. Ernesto Galarza, a long time fighter for justice from California. You should have my daughter, Christy, now a sophomore at the University of California at San Diego. You should have Corky Gonzalez.

The four of us could probably give you a composite picture of the thinking and feeling of the range of the Mexican-American community today. I urge that before you pretend to be an expert for your school on the Mexican-American that you devote considerable time to meeting and talking with the Galarzas, the Conzalez, the Rodriguez--both father and child--in your community.

There are, however, some ideas and approaches that I wish to present related to dealing with your Mexican-American constituency. When you set out to work with the community keep in mind that the leader who may be of the greatest help

is not the one identified by the Anglo community. Keep this in mind despite what your Chamber of Commerce and other civic groups may say. Mexican-Americans may use a person identified by the Anglos but his use will be for their purposes and should be regarded with care. The people you really want to deal with are those who have been identified by the Mexican-Americans. And it won't be easy to determine who this person is. But one fairly reliable way of identification is to determine if he lives in the Mexican-American community.

Any program to work with the community must take into account where the dialogue will take place. The school environment or any public building poses a threat to most Mexican-Americans. Their negative experiences in such circumstances dictate such a reaction. Use your local school principal for as much community involvement as possible. But get him out of his building for any real communication success. The problem of environment also applies to school groups. The participation in P.T.A. is not a reliable index as to the feelings of the community on educational programs of your schools. Those who may provide the real leadership and are sometimes most critical of the schools are not found in the PTA. But you must learn to deal with the group who may be most critical of the school. It may very well represent the majority feelings. Don't be defensive when dealing with these critics. They are trying to be helpful in their own way. Give them full credit for putting their ideas to you.

Remember that identification of leadership means a continual contact with the community. It means, also, that just putting a Mexican-American in the community climate will not necessarily insure a better relationship with the school. By all means use your Mexican-American staff members for all programs of the school, but be sure that your community person is able to relate to the environment in which he will be working. Being brown is not enough. We have to some extent the same hangup the Negro has--his oreo, black on the outside

and white on the inside. We have our fig newtons--brown on the outside and soft on the inside.

Remember also that the community action programs have not only given opportunity for leadership development, but also insight for many of these people for perceptive evaluation of institutional programs. You may find the community action person leading a movement against your school. He has some skills that place him in that position. You need to work closely with him to bring the school and the community into closer harmony and union of purpose.

Don't discount your young Chicanos. As I said earlier, he is the most potent weapon for seeking change. He is not bound by economic or social commitments and can move with great mobility. He is knowledgeable about what you are doing or not doing for the Mexican-American. He represents your best source for developing a program of change for your school system. By all means bring him into full participation despite obvious concerns by the older people. They may have some reservations about his abilities--but they all respect the fact that he is willing to take on the establishment. And the beauty is that he is not asking for participation by them--just moral support.

Don't expect the people to be talking processes. They will be talking ideas only. They expect your skills to be used for transformation into programs. Don't react defensively to sharp criticism. Be prepared to concede mistakes and failure and talk positively for change. Don't promise something you can not deliver--this seems very simple and apparent--but for the Mexican-American with so many promises undelivered, one more may well destroy a communication and trust relation so badly needed for an educational atmosphere conducive to better education.

I would urge that you develop in your school system a clinic similar to this. And it be a clinic where both the Mexican-American and the Anglo and the Negro come together for cultural and educational experiences. The Anglo,

particularly, needs to become better aware and consequently more concerned about the imperative educational needs of the Mexican-American. Mini-clinics similar to this in the barrio of your community may do much to help.

I will close with one or two brief observations. The power structure will appear at three levels or more in each community. You must be prepared to deal with all levels. To single out one or two and exclude others will court disaster. Second, people who are not now very vocal or critical will rise up soon. The clinics I suggested may be a valuable vehicle for channeling their anxiety and action into creative activities for important and peaceful change. Be careful of interpreting what some may say regarding things being just fine--you can be sure they are not. Go to the community--if you wait for them to come to you--you will be reacting and never again be able to chart your course. The determination for significant change in the education process of the bilingual bicultural student is rising. You have a choice of meeting--or being swamped by it.

Let me close by quoting a press release that followed a meeting of the "poor pelple" with the Office of Education last week. This meeting grew out of the "Poor People's March" earlier this year and was a forthright effort by the Office of Education to meet its commitments to involve the "poor people" in meaningful dialogue with top officials. I thought the meeting went very well and achieved some real progress, but the deep distrust of the minority to the educational establishment is far from being eased. What this press release says is a feeling that can be found in most communities throughout the Southwest. All of us must assume an obligation to erase this attitude.

"Once again the poor people have been invited to Washington to be given the run around that they get in their local community. The Office of Education is guilty of shifting responsibility back to local officials.

Traditional ways of funding and operating programs have not been responsive to the needs of the people they intend to serve. But we get a strong feeling that the Office of Education intends to continue to fund programs which will operate in a business as usual basis.

Although all programs encourage community participation, there is no commitment from the Office of Education to back the community groups into making meaningful changes which will prevent perpetuation of a system which has failed. There has to be a thorough overhaul of the school systems throughout the nation.

Although a great deal of research has been done on minorities--the minorities have not researched the researchers. We feel that there is a credibility gap. We do not intend to let the inactiveness of the Office of Education lull us into inactivity."

The ideas expressed in this release are very reflective of what I see and hear in all my travels throughout the Mexican-American communities. There is little doubt that all of us have a great deal to do if this deep seated distrust is to be replaced with confidence. I offer my services, I wish all of you the best of luck. Viva La Raza, Viva La Causa are cries of determination coupled with a search for better life for all Americans. Mucho Gracias.